

The Prescription Opioid Pain Medication Overdose Epidemic

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Rey DeCastro] From 1999 to 2014, more than 165,000 people have died from overdose related to prescription opioids, a type of drug sometimes used to treat moderate to severe pain.

Welcome to this podcast about the risks of prescription opioids. I'm your host, Rey DeCastro. Dr. Debbie Dowell is the co-author of CDC's Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain. She's joining us today to discuss the potential dangers of prescription opioids and how to protect yourself from these risks. Welcome, Dr. Dowell.

[Dr. Dowell] Thanks for having me.

[Rey DeCastro] Dr. Dowell, what has contributed to the problem of prescription opioid overdose in the United States?

[Dr. Dowell] Well, one out of 10 Americans have daily chronic pain, and over the last 20 years, opioids have been used a lot more often for chronic pain management. Sales of prescription opioids have quadrupled in the United States since 1999, and unfortunately, the number of overdose deaths have followed suit. While opioids can help manage certain types of pain, such as acute or advanced cancer pain, there isn't enough evidence to tell us whether or not opioids control chronic pain well.

[Rey DeCastro] Are there other dangers of using prescription opioid pain medications?

[Dr. Dowell] Yes. High dosages and long-term use of opioids put people at risk for overdose, as well as abuse and addiction. Almost two million people were addicted to prescription opioid pain medication in 2013.

[Rey DeCastro] What are some common names for prescription opioids?

[Dr. Dowell] Some common opioids include Oxycontin, Vicodin, and Opana, but these medications are prescribed under several brand names.

[Rey DeCastro] What can people who are taking prescription opioids do to protect themselves?

[Dr. Dowell] If you've been prescribed a medication for pain, check with your doctor to see if it's an opioid. *Always* take medication as directed and work with your doctor to be sure you're using your pain medication *safely*. CDC has developed a new prescribing guideline to help doctors make informed decisions about treating a patient's pain safely and effectively. Also, to protect loved ones, always store your medication in a secure place and never share it with others.

[Rey DeCastro] What should someone do if they think they're dependent on, or addicted to, prescription opioids, or someone they know may be misusing or addicted to these drugs?

[Dr. Dowell] If you think you might be dependent or addicted on prescription opioids, talk to your health care professional about your concerns. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration also has a National Helpline you can call for free, confidential assistance. Just dial 1-800-662-HELP.

[Rey DeCastro] Thank you for that phone number. That was 1-800-662-HELP. What can people do if they are suffering from chronic pain and *aren't* taking prescription opioids?

[Dr. Dowell] Well, it's always best to talk to a health care professional about all the available options for managing pain. Several effective treatments don't use medication. Exercise, physical therapy, and cognitive behavioral therapy can work well for managing long-term pain, and don't carry the same risks. If medication must be used for pain relief, there are non-opioid medications that can be effective. Over the counter medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, can also work well, or even *better* than opioids, in some cases.

[Rey DeCastro] Where can listeners get more information about prescription opioids?

[Dr. Dowell] Listeners can go to the CDC website at cdc.gov/drugoverdose. Once again, that's cdc.gov/drugoverdose.

[Rey DeCastro] Thanks, Dr. Dowell. Prescription opioids, particularly at high dosages or with long-term use, can put people at risk of addiction and overdose. Those who have chronic pain should talk to their health care professional about the best way to manage it, including other-the-counter medications, exercise and physical therapy.

[Announcer] *For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.*